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ABSTRACT

As required by state law, a consortium was developed by Eastern Washington University (consisting of the training institution, 10 school districts, and their professional organizations) whose responsibilities were the development of competencies for special education teacher training, supervision of teacher training programs, and evaluation of candidates for special education. Among competencies selected for the curriculum were knowledge and understanding of the nature, needs, and problems of specific groups of handicapped children, and knowledge and competence in the development, organization, and evaluation of instructional programs for handicapped children. Tenets of the program included field training convenient to rural teacher populations and selection criteria based on teaching assignment, teaching location, current education knowledge, and recommendation of the director of special education in the district. Courses were assembled by grouping competencies that were related. At the conclusion of the 2-year project each student met with his/her advisor and a committee for evaluation; in cases where certification was not awarded mutual agreement was reached for completion of the competencies. (PHR)

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COMPETENCY BASED FIELD TRAINING FOR THE
CERTIFICATION OF RURAL TEACHERS

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PROJECT:

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Several developments in the State of Washington lead to the need and feasibility of the training of teachers for special education in a completely field-based delivery system. The developments began in 1971 when State guidelines for a competency base teacher certification program were first drafted in the State Office of Education. They require that training institutions develop consortia consisting of at least one teacher training institution, one school district, and one professional organization. The responsibilities of the consortia were: the development of competencies for special education teacher training, advisory responsibility over training programs for teachers, and the evaluation of candidates for special education endorsements.

In 1972, Eastern Washington University developed a consortium with representatives from ten school districts and their professional organizations. Committees were then formed and charged with the responsibility of developing competency statements for the program. The competencies were completed in 1975 with a fourth generation document which was accepted by the consortium. In the same year, Eastern Washington University received approval from the State Office of its competency program - the first in the state. Also, in 1975 the State required, for the first time, that teachers assigned to special education classrooms have the proper training and preparation to provide adequate educational programs for the children in their classes.

This latter development in the rules and regulation which required specialized training for special teachers increased the need and urgency for comprehensive retraining of inservice personnel. At that time, less than 40% of the teachers in special education classrooms had training in special education. Delivery of

training to the teachers would be a difficult task in the eastern portion of the State. Washington State has a population of approximately three million. Two million of the population reside in the Seattle/Tacoma area while the remainder of the population are either north or south along the coast ~~or~~^{or} in Eastern Washington. Thus, less than a million of the inhabitants live in about a 50,000 square mile area known as Eastern Washington. Within Eastern Washington there are only two population centers, Spokane and the Tri-Cities. Further, of the State universities in Eastern Washington, only one (EWU) is in or near a population center. Obviously, the traditional summer programs or evening programs for the urban area would be insufficient to meet the retraining needs, therefore, this project was proposed which we felt should be viable in many rural areas. Notification from BEH was received in Spring 1976 for funding to begin September of 1976.

The generic competencies which formed the curriculum for the program were:

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE FIELD

Knowledge and understanding concerning characteristics, prevalence, general educational procedures, and resources relevant to appropriate categories of exceptionality and the handicapped children generally.

2. SPECIFIC AREAS

Knowledge and understanding of the nature, needs, and problems of specific groups of handicapped children.

3. TEACHING THEORY AND TECHNIQUES

Competency in the use of relevant techniques and approaches available for teaching individuals and groups of handicapped children, including the translation of learning behavior theory.

4. DIAGNOSIS

Competence in the use of summative and formative methods of measuring and communicating a handicapped pupil's skill status in the basic areas of learning.

5. PROGRAMS

Knowledge and competence in the development, organization, and evaluation of instructional programs for handicapped children.

6. MATERIALS

Knowledge and skill in the construction, evaluation, adaptation, and modification of instructional materials to the curriculum for handicapped children.

7. TEACHING

Competency in the classroom organization and management such as effective individualization of learning experiences, grouping for instruction, management techniques, methods for motivation, scheduling of activities, writing goals and objectives, and continuous monitoring of pupil progress.

8. OTHER RESOURCES

Proficiency in identifying and coordinating school and community resources to provide social, vocational, academic and related learning experiences for handicapped children.

9. COMMUNICATION

Competency in communication with professionals, paraprofessionals, parents, and others relating to program progress and behavior of the child.

These generic competencies each had objectives or subcompetencies which were defined in some detail to provide a consistent and reliable application.

Basic Tenets of the Program:

The basic plan was relatively simple: (1) The competencies developed by the consortium would form the curriculum of the teacher training, (2) All training would take place in field locations convenient to rural teacher populations and not within the immediate service area of other state universities, (3) All services, registration, advisement, evaluation, and instruction would take place in field locations, and (4) The criteria for admitting applicants to the program would be based on teaching assignment, teaching location, current special education knowledge, and recommendation of the director of special education in the district.

Implementation of the Program:

The grant funds were awarded for implementation beginning September 1976. The first decision to be made was the location of the field sites. It was decided that one site would be located in Richland (Tri-Cities), another in Moses Lake, and the third in Deer Park. Each site was either rural or out of the service area of a university. On the map you can see the locations in relation to Eastern and the major population areas.

During the fall (1976) teacher recruitment began. With the assistance of local special education directors, a brochure describing the program was distributed to teachers within driving distances of one of the three training centers. The brochure invited applications from teachers. Applicants were sent a copy of the competency based program and were requested to evaluate themselves using the program competencies as a guide. Meetings were held in

each training center to further explain the program, the selection process, and the self-evaluating purpose and process. For those applicants desiring further consideration, meetings were arranged with university advisors to verify the self-evaluating, develop a program that would lead to certification at either the initial or continuing level, and prepare the applicant for meeting with the review committee. The review committees then met with each applicant and final selections were based on the criteria set forth earlier in this document.

Course Development:

As teachers were selected for the program, it was possible to assess which competencies were most needed by the teachers. By grouping competencies that were related to one another, instructional units (courses) could be put together for presentation at each of the field centers. These units were identified by a number of credit hours and the competencies that were to be presented. The challenge was to interface the competency statements and instruction with the traditional class. It was simple enough to design the units of instruction. It was the assignment of credit hours to the competencies which became the problem. The credit allocation was necessary for enrollment and the competency completion for certification.

Faculty:

The Special Education faculty at Eastern Washington University are assigned full class loads and, therefore, had a difficult time taking on additional assignments. However, each was given the opportunity and did participate in the program by advising, teaching, and membership on review committees. It was necessary, however, to seek qualified people in the field to teach many of the units. Several members of the surrounding community had doctorate degrees in special education and these individuals were used whenever possible. We also solicited many members from the public schools that had at least a Master's Degree and expertise in the particular competency (ies) they were

assigned to teach. As a result, we were able to utilize practitioners in administration, vocational training, and so forth for these competencies.

The second year of the project continued the pattern of developing instructional units around competencies required by teachers at each site. Advisement and continual evaluation of progress was made throughout the year.

At the conclusion of the second year of the project, review committees were again convened comprising of special education administrator, teacher representative, and Eastern faculty representative. Each applicant had re-evaluated themselves against the competencies with the help of advisors, the advisor made a recommendation for certification and the applicant appeared before the committee for evaluation. The responsibility to the committee was to insure that the competencies had been met and to verify the applicant's ability to perform the competency. It may be said in compliment of the committees were to award the level requested, or if competence for the higher level was not demonstrated, they would award the lower level of certification, and in a couple of instances, they decided that certification was not deserved at that time. In the cases where certification was not awarded, the decisions were challenged. The director and the applicants then reviewed the performances of the applicants during the project's term, and in each instance, a mutual agreement was reached for the completion of competencies required for certification.

Results of the Project:

The project concluded at the end of the second year. Of the students enrolled, twenty-eight were awarded certification, ten on the initial level and eighteen on the continuing level. Two applicants were not awarded certification until

the completion of specific provisions set forth by the committee had been met. The director of the project was charged with the responsibility to oversee the completion of the provisions for certification. Two applicants were denied certification without the special provision at listed above. In addition, during the second year of the program, most of the instructional units (courses) were opened to non-project individuals for extension credits. Many individuals participated as "drop-ins" which provided extra training for teachers not officially admitted to the project.

Discussion:

Some difficulties were experienced by the program. Two years is not enough time to teach all of the competencies outlined by the consortium program - at least on a part-time basis. Another difficulty was overcoming teacher reluctance to be evaluated by a competency-based program. The teachers were more comfortable after the initial evaluation when they realized fully how helpful to them competency based programs actually were. Further, some teachers, identified by directors, who need special education training were reluctant to apply. However, by the second year of the program, some of those teachers asked, and were given, permission to take some of the classes. Even though not all of the participants received certification or for that matter even requested certification from the consortium, they did receive substantial training in Special Education.

The delivery of service to the field is not without difficulty, but it is not opinion of these authors that a quality program can be delivered in the field to substantial numbers of participants without excessive costs.